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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [KDEM](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: NO CLEAR TREND EVIDENT IN RECENT UNIVERSITY AND
EMPLOYEE ELECTION RESULTS

REF: A. GMP20090416762006
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 597

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Employee and student elections are widely seen by Palestinians as indicators of the relative standing of political factions at a given point in time. Recent elections reveal no clear trend in favor of either Fatah or Hamas, who continue to compete for influence and attempt to score political points in these contests. End summary.

Elections Seen as Indicators

[1](#)2. (C) Employee and student elections are widely seen by Palestinians as indicators of the relative standing of political factions at a given point in time. Recent UNRWA staff union elections and student body elections at Birzeit and Palestine Polytechnic University (Hebron) have been seized upon by both Fatah and Hamas as evidence of their popularity and their opponent's weaknesses.

[1](#)3. (C) In March 25 UNRWA staff elections in Gaza, both Hamas and a slate of PLO factions (including Fatah, PFLP, DFLP and Palestinian People's Party) made competing claims to victory (ref B). UNRWA staff unions are comprised of three sector unions -- teachers, medical workers, and service providers/clerks -- overseen by an executive committee. The pro-PLO bloc won an overall majority in two of the three sector unions, and therefore, will control the executive committee while the pro-Hamas bloc won a majority of votes (63 percent of the over 10,000 votes cast) and all eleven of the seats allocated to the teachers' sector, the largest part of UNRWA's work force. (Note: Following the announcement of election results, UNRWA management sent a letter to staff reminding them of their obligation to refrain from political activities. Palestinian contacts said the election campaigns were not publicly linked to the PLO or Hamas, but that the results were touted by both sides once announced. UNRWA officials reiterated to us their standing policy to discipline any employees found to have participated in political activity while employed by UNRWA. End note.)

[1](#)4. (C) On April 15, student government elections were held at Birzeit University and Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU) in Hebron. At Birzeit, Fatah won 24 seats, compared with Hamas' 22. Six seats went to smaller parties. Turnout was high, at 85 percent of the student body. Hamas boycotted PPU elections, handing Fatah 26 out of 31 seats. A National Democratic Institute report dated April 17 assessed that Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad boycott student government elections when they believe it cannot win, and participate when they believe to contest is winable and it is to their advantage to do so.

15. (SBU) Both parties claimed victory in the Birzeit elections. An April 16 statement by Hamas (ref A) said that "the fact that in this year's elections at Birzeit University the Islamic bloc won three seats more than in last year's elections is a substantial indication that the Palestinian people embrace the resistance's platform." Fatah Ramallah-district Secretary-General Ra'id Redwan said publicly, "the results of the elections in Birzeit University and the Polytechnic University in Hebron signal a re-embrace by Palestinian youths (of) the Fatah Movement." In April 2008, Fatah won 25 seats to Hamas' 19 at Birzeit. Hamas was victorious in 2007 with 22 seats to Fatah's 21. (Comment: Birzeit is not likely to be representative of the Palestinian electorate as a whole on absolute terms, but the trend of a narrowing gap between Fatah and Hamas is seen by local analysts as potentially significant. End comment.)

Security Crackdowns Limit Predictive Power

16. (C) A significant unknown in interpreting these election results is the extent to which security forces and militant groups exert pressure on voters and candidates. Hamas routinely claims intimidation and targeting of its candidates by PA security forces in the West Bank. Fatah has made similar claims about Hamas' intimidation in Gaza.

Fatah Student Leaders Reflect on Birzeit Victory

17. (C/NF) Fatah student activists from Birzeit told Poloff

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on April 22 that they were pleased with their victory in the April 15 elections but had hoped to win more seats. Coordinator of al-Shabibeh (Fatah Youth Movement) at Birzeit Murad al-Khatib, and activists Awad Meshal and Qassam Marwan Barghouti said PA President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) is politically weak in the West Bank and the Birzeit Shabibeh group purposefully distanced itself from both the PA and Abbas himself during the campaign. Barghuti (eldest son of jailed Fatah grassroots leader Marwan Barghuti) said the campaign had used only pictures of the late Yasir Arafat, and not a single picture of Abu Mazen.

18. (C/NF) Barghuti said Fatah's close relationship with the United States is politically damaging. He asked Poloff if US officials were secretly in contact with Hamas and expressed disappointment when told we are not, saying that Shabibeh would be eager to use such contacts to portray Hamas members as hypocrites. He said he hoped the Fatah sixth party congress would take place soon and observed that the failure to hold a credible, democratic congress would be damaging to the movement. However, he said, Shabibeh members are more dedicated to Fatah than senior leadership and would not leave the movement even if the congress is a disappointment.

Comment

19. (C) Although nearly all analysts agree these types of elections are indicators, deep divisions between Gaza and the West Bank make it exceedingly difficult to read the tea leaves. Commenting about upcoming internal elections in the Fatah Youth Movement, Barghuti and Meshal, who are opponents for student council president, both said that Palestinians prefer to go into an election with the outcome already decided. To the extent that Fatah and Hamas are uncertain of their relative standing, each may judge the status quo to be less risky than going forward with national elections in January 2010.

WALLES